

Enterprise

OPPORTUNITIES IN BUSINESS

Happy holidays for doggie

Pooches pampered while owners away

Leah Moore

A QUEENSLAND-based franchise is allowing dog owners to enjoy their holidays knowing their beloved pet is being spoiled with lots of love and individual attention, not to mention the all important "walkies".

Don't Fret Pet! is a dog boarding service that finds caring homes for dogs whose owners are going away and gives dog lovers the opportunity to mind dogs on a part-time basis, while getting paid.

Don't Fret Pet! director and self-confessed dog lover Jenny Brearley started the franchise in Sydney in 1993 after 18 years in the computer industry.

Ms Brearley operated Don't Fret Pet! on her own until 1998 but said she had always intended to turn the business into a franchise operation.

The group start-up came in Brisbane in May 2000 and on the Gold Coast last month.

It now has eight franchisees operating 12 territories, of which seven are in Sydney, four in Brisbane and one on the Gold Coast.

Since 1993 Don't Fret Pet! has organised more than 9500 "dog holidays".

Now based on the Sunshine Coast, Ms Brearley said despite a downturn in the travel industry with which the service is closely linked, Don't Fret Pet! Brisbane had experienced strong growth.

"We had a 241 per cent increase over the 2000-01 financial year and we are anticipating sales in excess of \$250,000 in our third year of operation in Queensland," she said.

The company is now look-

ing to expand to the Sunshine Coast and Melbourne, but Ms Brearley said with lots of interest coming from Perth, it was open to expansion elsewhere as long as the franchisee was suitable.

Maureen Reid, who bought the Brisbane South franchise last year after 18 months as a minder, is an example of a dog lover who has taken up this unusual business opportunity.

Ms Reid was working as a nurse in a surgical ward but when she was diagnosed with cancer she decided it was time to get out of the rat race and work for herself.

She said Don't Fret Pet! offered dog owners who dreaded leaving their pets when they went on holidays an alternative to impersonal kennels and was such a good business concept it virtually sold itself.

"Many of our customers breathe a sigh of relief when they tell us that now they'll be able to go away on weekends and holidays because they feel that their dog will receive plenty of attention in their absence," she said.

Ms Brearley said Don't Fret Pet! interviewed each dog minder in the minder's home to make sure they fitted the company's requirements but the dog owner had the final say in the suitability of the minder and their environment.

"Before we allow anyone to mind dogs for us we visit their home to examine the environment, meet the minder, their family and pets and find out what types of dogs they would like to mind," she said.

"We will only allow people who have the dog's welfare at heart to mind for us."



DON'T Fret Pet! franchisee Maureen Reid cuddling her 'clients'.

There are more than 400 minders on the company's database and it is still seeking more.

"Minding a dog on a part-time basis can fill a gap in the life of a dog lover who perhaps doesn't want to be

tied down by a dog all year round," Ms Brearley said. "For those dog minders who already have a dog, minding a dog provides their dog with a great playmate."

Ms Brearley said an indication of the type of people

who became m... that many of... asked for their... cheque from Don... to be made out to... related charity... than \$7500 donat... ties so far.